

Potential Responses of Religion to Modernity

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, many religions seek the ways how to deal with the current modernity for their continued existence and growth. Therefore, in this paper, I am going to define the meaning of modernity, describe its general features and characteristics, and then provide the framework for the formulation of how religion in general and Buddhism in particular respond potentially to its impact on the world, including living and non-living beings. Also, I will discuss how Buddhism benefits from modernity as well as potential Buddhist responses to the negative affect of modernity on the earth, especially on the environment.

Modernity is defined as a commitment and openness to the new in opposing to the old in the multidimensional complexity of philosophy, history, sociology, politics, economics, literatures, and arts.¹ Mostly, it characterizes the social and cultural changes around the world, especially those in Europe and America, from nineteenth century to the present century.² It generalizes the epoch of industrial capitalism, the commodity form, mechanical reproduction, the city, and everyday as a new category of experience.³ Dr. Paul Leclerc has outlined the general features and characteristics of modernity which can be classified into eight types: refutation of primordial cultural, literary and artistic models in favor of the advantage of modern models; the appearance of an significant self-consciousness and self-confidence characterized by a belief in the improvable progress of mankind; the establishment of a middle class society and social life characterized by liberal democratic institutions, free market economy, a dominant middle class, and private property; philosophical and scientific claims for enlightened maturity of critical reason over historical tradition, religious authority, ancestral devotion, classical culture

and pre-scientific superstition; the appearance of modern humanism characterized by autonomous self-assertion, scientific naturalism, technological mastery of nature, the demystification of human nature and nature generally, the liberation of theoretical curiosity, liberal optimism about progress and the secularization of culture; philosophical, social, political and legal insistence on the autonomy, self-determination, rational independence, and natural rights of all individuals; modernization by means of technological and industrial developments and its consequent effects upon societies, customs, and individuals; and a social, political, and philosophical emphasis upon the autonomous individual in contrast to communal identity.⁴ These are general features and characteristics of modernity which create great challenges for religion. In dealing with these challenges, there are five potential responses of religion toward modernity: first, the advocacy of new religious ideas or the claim to new insights into ancient religious traditions including the usage of 'new' to understand correctly the old; second, self-conscious accommodation of religious traditions to modern society; third, the determined attempt to preserve the continuing tradition, although self-consciously within limits posed by the new framework; fourth, infrequently recognized as equally a response to modernity, the strident reassertion of a presumed tradition in a condensed, purified, or even fundamentalist form; and the fifth, social change in the modern world is the generation of wholly new traditions.⁵

As a religious tradition, Buddhism can respond to them appropriately as follows. Regarding the first response (the advocacy of new religious ideas or the claim to new insights into ancient religious traditions including the usage of 'new' to understand correctly the old), according to Luis Gomez, Buddhism should focus on three areas of

adaptations (responses) such as doctrine including scripture and philosophy, practice, and experimentation. Concerning scriptural adaptation, Buddhists should seek less confirmation and more new insight on the critical study and interpretation of the text to attain a modern and conscious understanding of classical Buddhist hermeneutics. Also, Buddhists will have to reassess the importance of Indian materials and its roots as well as the appreciation of the importance of scientific textual work and critical self-awareness, including open doctrinal discussion. Also, relating philosophical adaptation, the aspects of emptiness, non-duality, causation, language, logical criticism, and morality could bring Buddhist philosophy closer to modern (Western) contemporary thoughts. Moreover, in the study of Buddhist theories of epistemology, logic, and metaphysics, Buddhism needs to ground itself in the critical study of philosophical tradition and the original Indian sūtra literature while having the modern adaptation. In practical adaptation, following the adoption of Western concepts of freedom, social justice and social action of capitalist, socialist, or Christian models, Buddhist cultures have entered the most serious ideological and social crises in their history. According to Buddhist historical approaches, these problems require the skillful application of specific practical methodologies for the alleviation of human suffering while preserving the transcendental aspect of personal liberation. Areas such as psychotherapy, social work, family counseling, relations between the sexes and the races, are all aspects that require practical strategies to which Buddhist institutions generally might have been too slow to react. Also, social involvement and social work as the Mahāyāna Buddhist centrality have not been developed to its maximum potential. Concerning the experimentation, since traditional continuity is more important, Buddhism should rely on its roots and gradually adjust its

doctrine and practice critically toward secularization to maintain its momentum for reform and growth. In order to facilitate this approach, changing in some hierarchies (in relation to the status differences between monks and nuns) and developing of tolerant attitude toward the diverging forms (of multinational schools such as Tibetan, Vietnamese, or Chinese Buddhism) are necessary.⁶

Regarding the second response (the self-conscious accommodation of religious traditions to modern society), the archaic Buddhist principles may be still relevant as the remedies for modern society's problems. For instance, in the field of economics, Westerners have been following Adam Smith's (1723-1790)⁷ model of "Self-benefit" or "Take-and-Take" that one's gain is other's lost. Conversely, the Buddha provided the model of "Self-benefit and Benefit-other" or "Win-Win" situations to create the strong and healthy economics through the responsibilities of consumers and producers.⁸ The Buddha advised consumers to divide wealth into four parts: one part for consumption; two parts for investment; and one part for saving.⁹ He also recommended consumers spend money wisely on food, clothing, illness and such other emergencies, charity, assist relatives, treating guests and visitors, generosity, and pay taxes.¹⁰ He listed four advantages of being rich and prosperous: happiness of having wealth, happiness of consuming, happiness of not having debt, and happiness of blameless conduct.¹¹ On one occasion, the Buddha advised people: to have persistent effort in whatever profession, to be skillful and diligent, to find the way to accomplish the task, and to be efficient and capable; to secure one's wealth so that government would not take them, fire would not burn them, water would not carry them, or ill-will people would not steal them; to create good relationship with other and to stay away from bad people; and to know how to

balance one's financial budgets.¹² These are applicable and reasonable principles that most people can put into practice. Concerning the relationship between employers and employees as the team of producers, the Buddha advised the employers that they should treat their employees fairly and suitably as follows: assign work according to their abilities; provide food and wages; take care of them when they are sick; share profits with them; and grant them occasional leave. Nowadays, before sending resume to apply for job, most people examine their future companies in many aspects besides the offered salaries such as health care benefit, retirement plan, 401k, or even the ESOP.¹³ Namely, in order to prolong the companies' successes, employers should share their fortunes with their employees. To employees the Buddha advised them to get to work early, leave late, perform their duties well, not steal from the supply closet, and uphold their employer's brand name. Presently, because the economy is on the down side, many employers tend to retain the best employees for the sake of companies' survivals and growth. Hence, whoever works hard during the economic upside would have more chance to keep the current job during the economic downturn. Also, in building the good relationship with customers, as the producers nowadays many big companies create the sharing plans with their customers through the "Purchase Power-Reward", "Fly Mileage Reward", and others. In addition, for the consumers, it is better to preserve wealth and protect environment such as saving money, saving trees, being vegetarian, and others in any economic circumstances for present and future needs. Moreover, Dalai Lama's exemplar of non-violence is the proper model for modern society. Since everyone wants to achieve happiness materially, mentally, and spiritually, non-violence can actualize that basic urge of human and other creatures on this earth; if we follow that non-violent principle, there

will be less war and conflict, namely sufferings. That's why Dalai Lama advocates non-violent policy for Tibetan cause and promotes it for world peace. Generally, the Buddhist models of Self-benefit and Benefiting-other in every aspect of life, the environment-friendly, and non-violence are the applicable principles that can accommodate and contribute beneficially to modern society.

A third pattern of response is the determined attempt to preserve the continuing tradition, albeit self-consciously within limits posed by the new framework. Before the Buddha entering *Paranirvana*,¹⁴ Ananda sadly inquired the Buddha that who will substitute him to lead and teach the Buddhists in the future. The Buddha replied that one should be a lamp unto oneself and take Dharma and Discipline as the Master.¹⁵ Indeed, historically Buddhism has survived and evolved more than twenty-five hundred years because of the well-built and healthy backbone of monastic communities. Especially, whenever a person makes the commitment to become a Buddhist officially, he would need to take the three refuges with Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.¹⁶ In Theravada literature, there was a record about the conversation between the monk Mahinda¹⁷ and the Sri Lankan king Devanampiya (307-267 BCE) in which the king asked when Buddhism will take root in his country. Mahinda replied that Buddhism can take root in Sri Lanka soil only when a Sri Lankan man enters the monastic life, keeps and recites the monastic precepts, and learns and practices Buddhism in his country.¹⁸ Namely, the firm establishment of Buddhism takes place only when indigenous monks recite and uphold monastic disciplines properly.¹⁹ Michael Carrithers correctly said, "No Buddhism without the Sangha, and no Sangha without the Discipline."²⁰ Actually, in 1991 a Sri Lankan Theravada group in Colorado established the *Namo Tassa* Incorporation to promote the

training of the indigenous monks for the continuity of Buddhist sangha.²¹ The Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara of Los Angeles has been providing the initiation for American converters to build up the indigenous sangha, because according to them, “Buddhism can hardly occupy a firm place in the mainstream of American society if it constantly has to be replenished with foreign born clergy who themselves may not be integrated into our society.”²² In the case of Master Hsuan Hua’s vision for creating a new Euro-American monastic sangha, he was successful at first in building the Euro-American monastic sangha in the 1970s due to religious experimentalism’s influence from the late 1960s. However, because of a large draw from the Chinese-American membership, his monastic sangha’s members gradually have more Asian-born and less Euro-American components. As the result, his remaining Eurpo-American monastic sangha mainly serves the Chinese-American laity.²³ Thich Nhat Hanh, a renowned Vietnamese Buddhist leader of the world, has established his multinational monastic and lay sanghas in France and the United States. He has written few books in guiding the monastic life as well as reviving the monastic rules for a modern life.²⁴ However, according to some conservative critics, his monastic sangha does not seem to maintain much the traditional strict rules. For example, critics point out his close and questionable relationship with his main follower (Chan Khong, a Vietnamese nun).²⁵ As Paul observed, up to date, the efforts of creating Euro-American monastic sangha yield little results in a lay-oriented religiosity in the U.S.²⁶ Professor Prebish also anticipated that the future of Euro-American Buddhism would be on the hands of the lay community.²⁷ In short, maintaining the continuity of monastic sangha is considered one of the immense challenges of contemporary Buddhism in response to modern shifts.

Regarding the fourth response, a form of reductionist or fundamentalist may reinterpret the tradition in a condensed, purified, and strict sense that may cut off the interaction and mutual exchange between it and others. This approach generally goes against the Buddha's teaching of self-benefit and benefiting-other. After having established of the monastic Sangha with the first sixty monks, the Buddha encouraged them going forth for the good, happiness, and benefit of gods and men with compassion that no two monks would go to the same direction.²⁸ Therefore, because of this encouragement, his newly enlightened disciples, Arahats, walked in different directions to disseminate his teaching. After the Buddha's *paranirvana* for more than two hundred years, during the third century B.C, the Indian king Asoka (304 B.C-232 B.C) sent many Buddhist missionaries to Far West such as Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, and Cyrene and Far East such as *Suvanna-bhumi* and China.²⁹ In fact, this type of missionary work had been carried out mainly by his monastic disciples as well as lay followers for over twenty-five hundred years of Buddhist spiritual and cultural evolvments which spread all over Asia continent and deeply touched the lives of its people from all walks of life. In general, whichever forms of Buddhism survive and grow throughout time, are those that could carry on the Buddhist spirits of maintaining their strong roots while being flexible in spreading and integrating their principles into contemporary society. Otherwise, they would isolate themselves and die out soon or later. For example, Rick Field has suggested that many Chinese Buddhist temples were built to serve more than twenty thousand Chinese immigrants after 1852 along California coastal cities.³⁰ However, most of these temples were sunk into oblivious status for a century because probably they just provided the religious service for the Chinese ethnicity, not for the indigenous people due to

language and cultural barriers, or they did not create program to train young generation to maintain the monastic continuity of religion.³¹ Currently, the Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese Buddhist ethnicities face similar problems of preserving and developing Buddhism in the West.³² Dr. Cuong Nguyen has mentioned that if there is no renovate program to train the young monks, either Vietnamese-American or purely American descendants, the Buddhist tradition would fade away gradually.³³ However, with the trend of many Westerners accepting and practicing Buddhism, its movement is reenergized and motivated in a new spirit of combination of ethnic and westernized Buddhism. In fact, Rick Field lists six trends which may affect Buddhist development in the modern age: laypeople's movement; meditation practices in all traditions; Western psychology and other related fields; women's leadership movement; engaged Buddhist movement; and democratic and antiauthoritarian or anti-hierarchical sentiments. In short, in order to endure and grow in modern age, Buddhism needs to use its best classical tool of flexibility while maintaining its root in globalization stage.

Regarding the fifth condition that social change in the modern world is the generation of wholly new traditions, it is impractical for Buddhism because even if it needs to modify itself for adapting the modernity, it still has to maintain its fundamental teaching and practice. If it is changed completely into different religious type, there is no need to call it as Buddhism any more. In short, these are the Buddhist responses to the modernity.

Furthermore, the developments of science, technology, logic, reason, and others in modern time have shined the light on Buddhist strengths in many different fields. In fact, Buddhism gains recognition and appreciation for its philosophical and practical

applications tremendously from many contemporary scientists, psychologists, health specialists, and others who have been utilizing Buddhist principles and its applications in their respective fields, beneficially. For instance, in the health care field, Buddhist meditation could assist patients to overcome many different mental related illnesses such as attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety disorder, major depression and other disorders marked by distracting thoughts. Actually, because of the advantage of sophistication of brain-scanning techniques, scientific research into meditation has been raised in the last decade. Recently, scientists found that months of intense training in meditation can sharpen a person's brain enough to help them notice details they might otherwise miss.³⁴ An MIT geneticist, Eric Lander, called Buddhism a "highly refined technology" of introspective practices that provide systematic access to subjective experience and its psychology offers a science of consciousness which can be helpful to comprehend the science of mind. Also, contrary to the Western psychological notion of seeing the attention and emotion as fixed and immutable, Buddhism points out the flexibility of the brain's and the mind's capacities of memory, self-control, and intelligence that can be changed, trained, and grew.³⁵ William James, often referred to as the father of American psychology, said, "This is the psychology everybody will be studying twenty-five years from now."³⁶ James often draws on Buddhist cosmology when framing perceptual concepts, such as his term "stream of consciousness," which is the literal English translation of the Sanskrit *vinnana-sota*. In *Varieties of Religious Experience*, James also breaks new ground for modern psychology by addressing the functional value of meditation.³⁷ Einstein once commented that Buddhism "contains a much stronger element of [the cosmic religious

feeling, by which] the religious geniuses of all ages have been distinguished."³⁸ The American physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer made an analogy to Buddhism when describing the Heisenberg uncertainty principle thusly:

If we ask, for instance, whether the position of the electron remains the same, we must say 'no;'; if we ask whether the electron's position changes with time, we must say 'no;'; if we ask whether the electron is at rest, we must say 'no;'; if we ask whether it is in motion, we must say 'no.' The Buddha has given such answers when interrogated as to the conditions of man's self after his death; but they are not familiar answers for the tradition of seventeenth and eighteenth-century science.³⁹

Niels Bohr, who developed the presently accepted model of the atom together with Earnest Rutherford, says:

For a parallel to the lesson of atomic theory...[we must turn] to those kinds of epistemological problems with which already thinkers like the Buddha and Lao Tzu have been confronted, when trying to harmonize our position as spectators and actors in the great drama of existence.⁴⁰

Arnold Toynbee once suggested that future historians would conclude that the most significant event of our age was the introduction of Buddhism in the West.⁴¹ In recent years, there has been a burgeoning interest in the relationship between the Buddhist and psychotherapeutic traditions among psychotherapists, researchers, and spiritual practitioners. The nascent dialogue between the Buddhist meditative and Western psychoanalytic traditions has been perhaps the most illuminating aspect of this historic encounter, yielding crucial insights about human development, conceptions of

selfhood, psychopathology, and cure (Engler, 1983; Rubin, 1991, 1992).⁴² These scientists have provided a new outlook for the secular and the non-Buddhists in viewing Buddhism in rational, logical, and scientific ways. Especially, it is encouraging for the Buddhists to recognize that Buddhism is so comparable to modernity in most disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields, as David L. McMahan mentions, “The compatibility of Buddhism and modern science has not only become a staple of popular Buddhist literature; it has also become a hypothesis in a large number of quite sophisticated experimental studies.”⁴³ Therefore, Buddhism benefits greatly with the advances of modern developments, because they reveal Buddhist strengths in those areas that have been mentioned above. Hence, the engagement between Buddhism and modernity is so important, because this religious-scientific interaction may bring mutual benefits for both as *Shoji Muramoto* states, “To engage with modernity, finding common ground on which to stand together will benefit both Buddhism and the world at large. Psychology and psychotherapeutic techniques, along with physics, genetics, archeology, zoology, cosmology etc, can complement our understanding and practice of Buddhism.”⁴⁴ In addition, the emergence of Capitalism, Socialism, and Communism and the encounter with Christianity serve as a wake up call for Buddhism in the social service and engagement areas. Even the notion of alleviation of physical sufferings had been mentioned through the story of the Buddha feeding the farmer before giving the spiritual advice or Asoka’s establishment of Buddhist welfare state, Buddhists have not been involving much this in field, because the idea of involving too much in secular life may bring the attachment, disempowerment, and burnout. However, in his “Bendowa” (Wholehearted Practice) essay in the *Shobogenzo*, Dogen wrote, “He who regards

worldly affairs as an obstacle to his training only knows there is no Way in worldly affairs, not knowing that there is nothing such as worldly affairs to be distinguished from the Way.”⁴⁵ Also, since sentient beings’ sufferings may directly or indirectly affect one’s spiritual practice because of the interdependent web of life, helping others to alleviate their sufferings is to assist oneself on the spiritual path according to Mahayana’s Bodhisattva doctrine. Historically, since Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia mostly concentrates on the traditional monastic activities, it was challenging by other religions, especially the aggressive Christian evangelists during and after the colonized periods within many Buddhist countries. As the result, a movement of Engaged Buddhism, especially in the fields of social services and political involvement including the Buddhist Peace Movement, has been advocating and expanding since 1960s in response to the modernity.⁴⁶ Indeed, Thich Nhat Hanh, the Dalai Lama, and Maha Ghosananda emphasized that spiritual effort, mindfulness, and meditation are the very actions that will decisively shape one’s speech, social behaviors, and livelihood – and these will, in turn, have incalculably beneficial ripple effects throughout society.⁴⁷ In the fourth precept of Tiep Hien Order, Thich Nhat Hanh suggested that instead of running away from sufferings, Buddhists should find away to recognize them in all mindful means.⁴⁸ Consequently, there are numbers of Buddhist schools, hospitals, and other services arising in Buddhist and non-Buddhist countries such as Order of Interbeing,⁴⁹ Tzu Chi foundation in Taiwan,⁵⁰ Prison Dharma Network,⁵¹ and others. Indeed, due to interactions with Western modernity, these Buddhist engagements have been reenergized and broadened. In short, because of modern developments, Buddhism has progressed tremendously by revealing its strengths to the fields of meditation, psychology, and

others that are compatible with modern science, while it adjusts its weakness in the field of social service and the secular interaction in modern society.

Furthermore, during the process of gaining in life, we are giving up others; so does modernity. Namely, while modernity brings new sources of life through modern technology, science, and others, it leaves numerous negative impacts on every life's components, including Buddhism. Here, I only focus on a negative byproduct of modernity, a damaging environment, and discuss how Buddhism responds to it wisely and expediently. Contemporarily, many books, reports, articles, movies, and others have been raising the alarm for this serious human problem.⁵² For example, a report of climate change from an intergovernmental panel mentions, "Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global average sea level."⁵³ In this report, it also says that global increase in carbon dioxide (the most important anthropogenic greenhouse gas which produces greenhouse effect of global warming) concentration are due mainly to fossil fuel use (of transportation) and land use change, while those of methane and nitrous oxide are primarily due to agriculture.⁵⁴ The economic and social assessing vulnerabilities and the risk from climate change depend on the degrees of adaptation; the faster warming rates of climate change may be more difficult and costly than for slower rates.⁵⁵ Generally, there are several serious effects of global warming. They include extreme weathers of drought, tropical cyclone activity, high sea level,⁵⁶ double catastrophe losses in every ten years,⁵⁷ requirements of maintenance and renewal of transportation,⁵⁸ more negative agricultural impact,⁵⁹ more difficulty in adaptation for the coasts of developed countries,⁶⁰ having approximately 150

million environmental refugees in 2050,⁶¹ increasing hunger and disease in Africa,⁶² triggering ‘mass extinction event’ of over 50 percent of animal and plant species,⁶³ creating forest fire, increasing water scarcity in coastal zones,⁶⁴ bringing biggest threat to human health in the 21st century,⁶⁵ spreading of diseases which affect physical health⁶⁶ and economic costs,⁶⁷ threatening children health,⁶⁸ and creating multiple threats on national security.⁶⁹ In general, these are contemporaneous environmental problems. Because of past ignorance of the connection with the universe due to the narrow confines of self interest, human beings have presumably taken the right of possession and exploitive domination over the natural world which brings the severity of planetary degradation as discussed above. Hence, only when humans learn and recognize the fundamental organic continuity and connection between the universe, the earth, and creatures’ rich heritages, they can make the appropriate commitments consistently to protect biodiversity and natural habitats and preserve the planetary air, waters, soil, and plants.

Particularly, the Buddha has addressed the nature of the phenomenal world as the fluid contingency through the *pratityasamutpada* or ‘conditioned co-production’ principle, “This being, that becomes; from the arising of this, that arises; this not becoming, that does not become; from the ceasing of this, that ceases.”⁷⁰ Namely, the coming into being, existence, and disappearance of any particular thing is a collaborative and dynamic process of many other things in a context of relations, a nexus of interdependent factors. Explicitly, the very basic survival of human beings is depended totally on the planetary existence. Hence, if we damage the earth (in the end) we endanger our very existence. With that knowledgeable notion, if we protect the natural

world and its habitants, we could save ourselves from extinction. Theoretically and practically, Buddhism provides the guidelines of five cardinal precepts and the principles of Four Noble Truths, and the Eight Fold Paths to respond to environmental problems. In fact, the basic moral obligation is the five cardinal precepts for lay people: no killing; no stealing; no sexual misconduct; and no taking intoxicant substances. Regarding no killing precept or non-violent approach, above we cannot kill other human beings, and below we need to restrain ourselves directly and indirectly from harming other animals, small living creatures, or even the trees and plants. If we lessen our meat consumption daily, we can alleviate the livestock's sufferings of being killed for our meat and reduce the environmental damages, because one-quarter of greenhouse gas emission comes from meat industry.⁷¹ If we plant more trees and protect our green forests, we will be healthier because they are our sources of oxygen for breathing. Since the Buddha's life had strong bond with environment,⁷² His teachings mostly emphasize on reverence of life and the recognition of interdependent life. As Buddhism spread to other countries, its strong hold of monastic life mostly locate in the forest, mountain, or rural areas where many monks and nuns had achieved their enlightenment regardless of their spiritual techniques. In short, if we harm or destroy the living beings and non-living beings, consequently we harm ourselves. Conversely, if we protect and cherish their life, our life would be protected and cherished. With regard to the no stealing precept, we should not take whichever properties do not belong to us. This moral obligation may be extended to preserve and protect inherit and irreversible natural resources of the Mother Earth and to restrain ourselves from unwise, inappropriate, and uncontrolled developments, marketing, and consumption depleting of present and future generation such as over mining natural

resources, over timbering logs, and others. Regarding the third precept, we should restrain ourselves from sexual misconduct. Because of lustful minds, we seek for external affair with other opposite sex which potentially may bring the AIDS epidemic and other transmittable diseases for ourselves and others. As a result, our human and natural resources might be depleted. For example, people of these incurable diseases may be non-productive persons or become burden to themselves, their family, and society, financially, physically, and mentally. Namely, their banking accounts would be depleted if they have ability to pay for medical bills, or their medical bills would be burdened for MediCare or Medicaid in this country. In short, living sexually responsible lives may save us from having these incurable diseases which may drain our own financial or mental resources. Furthermore, the government could reallocate these funds toward solving environmental problems instead of social issues. Regarding the fourth precept, we should live a truthful life of not telling lie or cheating others in body, speech, and mind, because only trust can hold the cluster bonds of people in family, community, and society together. Within that truthful life, we won't do illegal logging, mining, fishing, or growing marijuana plants that can protect our life and environment. Regarding the fifth precept, we need to refrain ourselves from taking any intoxicating substances in short and long term effects such as alcohol and harmful drugs, or even avoiding involvement in trafficking or production of them. The use of these harmful substances is not only hazardous to the physical and mental well-being of consumers and their relatives, but it also causes great damage to nature by its production.⁷³ The Buddha mentioned six dangerous types of drinking (alcohol): the actual loss of wealth; increase quarrels; susceptibility to disease; an evil reputation; indecent exposure; ruining one's

intelligence.⁷⁴ The plantations of illicit narcotics crops such as opium poppy have brought forest removal and water and soil pollution. In short, by avoiding taking, trafficking, and producing alcohol and illicit drugs, we won't pollute and damage our body, mind, and the environment. Generally, these five cardinal precepts provide a guideline and path for us to protect ourselves, other living and non-living beings, and environment.

Next, the Buddha's first teaching, the Four Noble Truths, explains the nature of life: the problem; the cause of problem; the end of problem; and the way how to end the problem. Here we can review environmental problems from this perspective: currently we have this problem; this problem comes from people's greedy and indifferent minds; this problem can be solved; the way to end this problem is through the application of Eightfold paths which include the right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right meditation, and right mindfulness. First, we should have the right understanding about the cause (greedy mind) and present damaging condition of the environmental issue as well as the urgency of reversing the trend. Second, with the right thought, we develop loving-kindness and compassion for all creatures including sentient and non-sentient beings on the air, on the earth, and in the water. With the wisdom of right understanding and right thought about the problem, we promise ourselves with right speech that we will care for the environment as well as encouraging others to do so. Next, we implement them into actual action of reversing the trend and protecting it with right action by restraining ourselves from harming living creatures or destroying the natures. Then, we choose right livelihood by having right occupation of not working for inhumane companies such as slaughterhouse, chicken farm, logging, and others. We put right effort physically, orally, and mentally of planting

more trees, protect forest, and others. In order to have proper thought, speech, and action, we need to train our mind properly. The Buddha mostly encouraged his monastic followers to practice meditation in the forest, rural, or secluded areas as follows: “Herein, monks, a monk who has gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty place, sits down cross legged, holding his back erect, arousing mindfulness in front of him.”⁷⁵ Therefore, it would be natural for Buddhism to advocate the loving and kindness and protection of natures for the sake of our and other physical needs and spiritual practices of right concentration and right mindfulness. In short, by applying right concentration and right mindfulness to reveal the inherit wisdom which enhances the right understanding and right thought about the current environmental problem, we could implement them through right speech, right action, and right livelihood to preserve and protect the nature for our sake as well as that of the later generations.

In summary, in this paper I have discussed five types of potential Buddhist responses to the modernity, Buddhist benefits from modernity, and how Buddhism responds to the negative impact of modernity such as environmental problem. First, Buddhism should focus on three areas of adaptations such as doctrine including scripture and philosophy, practice, and experimentation in responding to modernity. Second, the archaic Buddhist principles may still be relevant remedies for modern society’s problems through the model of “Self-benefit and Benefit-other” or “Win-Win” situations to create the strong and healthy relationship in life. Third, the Buddha’s teaching and his moral guidance are the foundation for preserving the continuing tradition in modern times. Fourth, Buddhism always encourages its followers to reach out and share its principals and practices with others. Fifth, Buddhism has gained recognition and appreciation from

scholars, scientists, and experts in many different fields through the advances of modern science and technology. Sixth, the Buddhist conceptual notion of interdependency of things can serve as a wake up call for human to help the modern society to deal with the current environmental problems, the negative byproducts of modernity, effectively through the principles and practices of the five precepts, the Four Noble Truth, and the Eight Fold Paths.

Note

¹ John F. Wilson, "Modernity." *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Ed. Lindsay Jones. Vol. 9. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005. 6109. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Gale. University of the West. (accessed October 20, 2009).

² Ibid., 6110.

³ Marilyn Ivy, "Modernity," in *Critical Term in The Study of Buddhism*, ed. Donald Lopez (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 315.

⁴ Paul Leclerc, "What is modernity? Complexity, Controversy, and Characteristics." Logos Retrieved.

http://faculty.ccri.edu/paleclerc/existentialism/what_is_modernity.shtml

⁵ John Wilson, "Modernity", 6110. Since I want to remain faithful with the proper responses to modernity, I do not elaborate them in my writing with the concern of misleading them.

⁶ Luis O. Gomez, "Expectations and Assertions: Perspectives for Growth and Adaptation in Buddhism," *Zen Buddhism Today: Annual Report of the Kyoto Zen Symposium I* (Kyoto: Kyoto Seminar for Religious Philosophy, 1983), 38-46.

⁷ He is Scottish moral philosopher and a pioneer of political economy.

⁸ The Sigalovada Sutta: Dn 31.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ A.II: 65.

¹¹ A.II: 62.

¹² A. IV, 281 and A.IV. 285.

¹³ Employee Stock Ownership Plan. As of 2009, there is about 14 millions employees participate in this program in the U.S. <http://www.nceo.org/main/article.php/id/6/printable/y/>.

¹⁴ Buddhists have notion that Buddha never die, spiritually. He just entered the everlasting peace, namely nirvana.

¹⁵ Mahaparinibbana Sutta DN 16.

¹⁶ According to Steven and Prebish, in early literature sometime the Buddha used the term caturdisa-sangha or the "Sangha of the four congregations of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen, but it is clearly from his

emphasizes that he means the monastic sangha. Charles Prebish and Steven Heine, *Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003), 45.

¹⁷ He was born in 3rd BCE century as the son of the Mauryan Emperor Asoka (304-232 BCE) and was a Buddhist monk depicted in Buddhist sources as bringing Buddhism to Sri Lanka.

¹⁸ Samantapasadika I, 102; cf. Mahavamsa 126; Dipavamsa chapter 14, vss. 20-4; Vinaya-nidana 103.

¹⁹ Paul David Numrich, "Vinaya in Theravada Temples in the United States," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, no. 1 (University of Illinois at Chicago, 1994), <http://www.buddhistethics.org/1/numrich1.html>.

²⁰ Michael B. Carrither, "'They Will Be Lords Upon the Island': Buddhism in Sri Lanka." *In The World of Buddhism: Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Society and Culture*. Ed by Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich. (New York: Facts on File, 1984), 133-46.

²¹ Charles Prebish and Kenneth Tanaka, *Face Of Buddhism In America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press), 151.

²² *Ibid.*, 159.

²³ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁴ Jung Myung-jin, "Buddhist Precepts Revised For A Modern Life," *JoongAng Daily*, April 2003.

²⁵ *The Vietnamese People Police Newspaper*, "Thich Nhat Hanh and Prajna Problem". October 2009.

²⁶ Charles Prebish, *Face of*, 161. Actually, the Roman Catholic Church also faces the similar problem of priest-shortage because of the married priest movement in other denominations.

²⁷ Charles Prebish, "Buddhism," in Charles H Lippy and Peter W. Williams, eds., *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience: Studies of Traditions and Movements* (New York: Scribner's, 1988), 2:677.

²⁸ Mahavagga. Vinaya 1.11.1.

²⁹ Ananda Guruge, *Buddhism-The Religion and Its Culture* (Madras, India: M. Seshachalam & Co., 1984), 53.

³⁰ Rick Field, *How The Swan Came to The Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), 70-71.

³¹ One may find out the hard fact about some old Chinese Buddhist temples in San Francisco and other areas that had been transformed into shopping centers, stores, etc. Please read the story of Chinese temples

in Cambria, San Luis Obispo County, California at the link

http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/5views/5views3h28.htm

³² Yvonne Kennedy, "Buddhist Church Faces End of an Era Century-old Japanese Congregation Fading from its Oakland Beginnings," Retrieved,

<http://journalism.berkeley.edu/projects/gorneyj200/buddhist.html>.

³³ Cuong Nguyen and A W. Barber, "Vietnamese Buddhism in North America, Tradition and Acculturation," in *The Face of Buddhism*, ed. Charles Prebish (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 146.

³⁴ Charles Q. Choi, "Study: Zen Meditation Really Does Clear The Mind," *Special to LiveScience*. September 2, 2008.

³⁵ Hara Estroff Marano, "Buddhism and the Blues," *Psychology Today's Blues Buster*, October 1, 2003. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200310/buddhism-and-the-blues>.

³⁶ David Scott, "William James and Buddhism: American Pragmatism and the Orient," *Religion* Vol. 30: 335, 2000.

³⁷ William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*. (1902; New York: Viking Penguin, 1982).

³⁸ Albert Einstein, "Religion and Science". *New York Times Magazine*, 9 November 1930 reprinted in *Ideas and Opinions*, ISBN 0517003937, p. 36.

³⁹ J. R. Oppenheimer, *Science and the Common Understanding*, (Oxford University Press, 1954), 8-9.

⁴⁰ Neils Bohr, *Atomic Physics and Human Knowledge*, ed. by John Wiley and Sons (New York: Wiley, 1958), 20.

⁴¹ Diane Morgan, *The Buddhist experience in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 1.

⁴² Jeffrey B. Rubbin, *Psychotherapy and Buddhism* (New York and London: Plenum Press), 3.

⁴³ David L. McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," *The American Academy of Religion* (2004): 898.

⁴⁴ Shoji Moramoto, “Awakening and Insight: Zen Buddhism and Psychotherapy,” *Buddhism, Religion and Psychotherapy in the World Today*, ed. Polly Young-Eisendrath & Shoji Muramoto (Brunner-Routledge, 2002).

⁴⁵ Ken H. Jones, *The New Social Face of Buddhism: A Call to Action* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications), 222.

⁴⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Lotus in The Sea of Fire* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976), 137.

⁴⁷ Christopher S. Queen, Charles S. Prebish, Damien Keown, *Action dharma: new studies in engaged Buddhism* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 3.

⁴⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1987), 91.

⁴⁹ Established by Thich Nhat Hanh.

⁵⁰ Established by a Buddhist nun (cite note).

⁵¹ Found by Fleet Maul in 1985.

⁵² One of the most famous and critical works on this issue is the documentary and books of former Vice President Al Gore: The 2006 documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, which won an Academy Award in 2007 and the book *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It*, which won a Grammy Award for Best Spoken Word Album in February 2009.

⁵³ Solomon, S., D. Qin, M. Manning, Z. Chen, M. Marquis, K.B. Averyt, M.Tignor and H.L. Miller (eds.) IPCC, 2007: “Summary for Policymakers,” *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA), 5.

⁵⁴ Qin, IPCC, p.2.

⁵⁵ Schneider, S.H., S. Semenov, A. Patwardhan, I. Burton, C.H.D. Magadza, M. Oppenheimer, A.B. Pittock, A. Rahman, J.B. Smith, A. Suarez and F. Yamin, 2007: “Assessing key vulnerabilities and the risk from climate change.” *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, M.L. Parry, O.F. Canziani, J.P. Palutikof, P.J. van der Linden and C.E. Hanson, Eds., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 782.

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- ⁵⁹ Michael McCarthy, "Climate change poses threat to food supply, scientists say," *The Independent*, April 27, 2005.
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- ⁶² *International Institute for Environment and Development*, "Africa - Up in smoke? The second report from the Working Group on Climate Change and Development," July 2005.
- ⁶³ Mayhew, Peter J; Gareth B. Jenkins, Timothy G. Benton (October 23, 2007). "A long-term association between global temperature and biodiversity, origination and extinction in the fossil record". *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* (Royal Society Publishing) 275 (1630): 47. doi:10.1098/rspb.2007.1302. PMID 17956842. PMC 2562410. <http://www.journals.royalsoc.ac.uk/content/3x081w5n5358qj01/>. Retrieved 2007-10-30.
- ⁶⁴ *EPA: Strategic Planning Futures Workshop*, 'Water Scarcity: Summary Report,' October 2005, p. 9.
- ⁶⁵ *UCL News*, "Climate change: The biggest global-health threat of the 21st century," May 14, 2009. <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/0905/09051501>. Retrieved 2009-08-08.
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⁶⁸ *American Academy of Pediatrics*, “Global Climate Change and Children’s Health,” *Pediatrics* Vol. 120 No. 5. November 01, 2007, pp. 1149-1152 (doi:10.1542/peds.2007-2645).

⁶⁹ *Military Advisory Board*, “National Security and the Threat of Climate Change,” April 16, 2007.

⁷⁰ *Majjhima-Nikaya*, 2:32; *Sayutta-Nikaya*, 2:28.

⁷¹ *Food and Agricultural Organization of United Nations*, “Livestock a major threat to environment: Remedies urgently needed,” November 29, 2006.

⁷² He was born in the Lumbini garden; his first meditative experience was under a tree when he was about twelve years old. He did ascetic practices in the forest for six years. He attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. He delivered the first teaching in the Deer Park. All of His monasteries located in the denizen of woods for the next 45 years. He entered Nirvana under the twin Sal trees.

⁷³ Daniel H. Henning, *Buddhism and Deep Ecology* (Bloomington, IN: Daniel H. Henning, 2002), 52.

⁷⁴ *Sigalovada Sutta: The Discourse to Sigala* (DN 31).

⁷⁵ *Anapanasati Sutta: Mindfulness of Breathing* (MN 118).

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